DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 118 JC 920 419

AUTHOR Messina, Robert C.; Fagans, Alice C.
TITLE Assessment: What's the Next Step? A Model for Institutional Improvement.
PUB DATE Jun 92
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Summer Institute on Community College Effectiveness and Student Success (4th, Vail, CO, June 21-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; *Change Strategies; *College Environment; *College Outcomes Assessment; Community Colleges; Educational Assessment; *Models; *Organizational Climate; Program Development; Program Evaluation; *Program Improvement; Remedial Programs; Resistance to Change; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Burlington County College NJ

ABSTRACT

Institutional change requires that "restraining" forces (those forces resisting change) be minimized and "driving" forces (those forces moving in the direction of change) be maximized. Lasting change involves broad-based staff participation in the change process; this requires the establishment of multiple feedback levels or linkages. The institutional change model adapted by Burlington County College (BCC) in Pemberton, New Jersey, is based upon extensive feedback providing "informational linkages" necessary for change. The model has three components: (1) the "improvement area," comprised of the issues and structures in need of change identified through outcomes assessment procedures; (2) "institutional culture," including those aspects of leadership, governance, climate, faculty professionalism, external regulations, funding, enrollment, community, and the assessment structure that affect the specific improvement areas identified; and (3) "results of the change process," including changes in goals, objectives, and assessment methods that have resulted from implementation of new procedures, policies, and curriculum. In an effort to minimize the restraining forces and maximize the driving forces affecting efforts to bring about change within the Basic Skills Program (BSP) at BCC, several activities were undertaken. Data on state-mandated assessment were presented at the first semester faculty meeting. Task forces were convened to analyze the BSP and informal discussion groups were held. A basic skills handbook was created, a review of the reading program was scheduled, and special support was provided for faculty involved in computer/video instruction. (PAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED348118

Assessment: What's the Next Step?
A Model for Institutional Improvement

Robert C. Messina, President
Burlington County College

Alice C. Fagans, Director Testing
and Academic Assessment
Burlington County College

June 1992

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. C. Fagans

R. C. Messina

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

JC 920 419

Paper presented at the Annual Summer Institute on Community College Effectiveness and Student Success (4th, Vail, CO, June 21-24, 1992)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Assessment: What's the Next Step?
A Model for Institutional Improvement

Robert C. Messina, President
Burlington County College

Alice C. Fagans, Director Testing
and Academic Assessment
Burlington County College

Introduction

Much of the literature on outcomes assessment focuses on the development of outcomes, the development of methods to assess outcome success, and data analysis. However, there is limited information on how to utilize the assessment information to improve quality of programs and services. Improvement clearly constitutes change on a college campus. The degree of change is dependent on the extent of improvement that is necessary. The greater the degree of change the greater the chance of disrupting the culture of the institution. Unless there are clear strategies for change which consider the culture of the institution, modification for improvement will most likely be resisted. This presentation will focus on the change model that Burlington County College is using to make changes in its 20 year old basic skills program. We will present this information in three parts, Change Theory, Burlington County College Model for Institutional Improvement, and Change Strategies in the Basic Skills Program.

Change Theory

The Burlington County Model for Institutional Improvement is drawn from Kurt Lewin's, Jack Lindquist's, and George Keller's writings on institutional change. We utilized the theories of these individuals because they approach institutional change as a system that is influenced by the culture of the institution and its external environment.

Kurt Lewin explains the process of change as the result of modification in the factors that are active in maintaining an organization in a state of "quasistationary equilibrium" which may also be referred to as the status quo. These factors are categorized as either driving forces or restraining forces. When the sum of the magnitude of the

driving forces is equal to the sum of the magnitude of the restraining forces the institution is said to be in a status quo state. Change in the status quo can be brought about in two ways, 1) decrease the opposing forces and 2) increase the forces that move the institution in the desired direction of change. (Lewin, 1964, pp. 358-360) In an institution where the balance of these forces has been stable for some period of time, it is necessary to "unfreeze" the situation before constructive and planned change can occur. Planned change requires a rational approach to the minimizing of restraining forces and a maximization of driving forces.

According to George Keller in his book, Academic Strategy-The Management Revolution in American Higher Education, stimulants for change in higher education come from three sources, 1) "crisis in finances, enrollments, or quality that mandates quick, decisive, intelligent action", 2) "strong pressure from outside, by a governor or legislator, influential alumni, the press, key trustees, or a state higher education agency...", and 3) "a vigorous, farsighted leader,...". (Keller, 1983, pp. 164.) All of these together or by themselves provide the stimulus to "unfreeze" an institution's culture.

Jack Lindquist in his book titled, Strategies for Change, points out that "(1) interpersonal and informational linkage; (2) active openness; (3) initiating, guiding, involving and influential leadership; (4) ownership and (5) material and psychic rewards are necessary when attempting to change the "practices of complex organizations". (Lindquist, 1978, p. 240) He stresses the need to gather information and make comparison of the data to goals, practices and outcomes. Once this phase is complete an institution must develop strategies to evaluate its performance involving the constituencies of the institution. In higher education, this would include faculty, staff, administration, students, board members, and community supporters.

Burlington County College
Model for Institutional Improvement

As Lindquist recommends, our model has an emphasis on the assessment of outcomes, on avenues of participation (openness and ownership), and avenues of multiple feedback levels (linkages). We agree with the authors above, that opportunity for participation in the process is of the utmost importance in creating lasting change.

Our model, shown on the next page, is divided into three parts called, "Improvement Area", "Institutional Culture", and "Results". Each of these parts are connected by feedback paths to provide the informational linkages

necessary for change. The feedback mechanisms, represented by the arrows on the model add the dimensions of time and continuity. An institutional improvement model implements and capitalizes on the interrelatedness of its various components and on the continuous feedback of information. The next three sections of this report elaborate on the three parts of the Burlington County College Model, Improvement Area, Institutional Culture, and Results.

I. Improvement Area

The circles in the improvement area of the model should contain the issues in which the college, based on outcomes assessment, wants to make improvements. For example, the results of our basic skills assessment suggests several areas for improvement. These areas would be entered into this section of the model.

The major driving force for change (improvement) comes from the assessment of well defined outcome focused objectives. It is this information that adds direction and impetus to "unfreeze" the culture in order to make changes in policy, method, and procedures and to stimulate innovation which results in improvement.

The Burlington County College's outcomes assessment process is not much different from any outcomes assessment process. It includes:

1. Establishment of goals;
2. Creation of outcomes objectives for each goal;
3 Development of standards of success;
4. Establishment of a method of assessment;
5. Analysis of results;
6. Implementation of an improvement strategy; and
7. Changes in policy, procedure, curriculum, etc.

In addition, we have established a feedback path for all levels of the outcomes assessment process. Information about the impact of the new strategy will flow up to each aspect of the assessment process. Change in the goals, outcome objectives, the assessment, and the strategies may result from the implementation of the new process.

BURLINGTON COUNTY COLLEGE

MODEL FOR INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

II. Institutional Culture

Once the areas of improvement are determined, we need to examine the various aspects of the institution's culture in relation to the improvement areas. When we use the word culture we mean more than institutional climate. The culture of the institution encompasses all behaviors of individuals and groups in the college setting. As Vaughan points out, "Culture consists of those things that make an institution distinct: its history, its traditions, its values, its interaction with the larger environment, its ceremonies, its renewal process..., and its evaluation process..." (Vaughan, 1992, p. 3) Institutions of higher education, if they are to survive the nineties, must plan for change that is consistent with the culture of the institution.

We selected the following aspects of our culture for our model: leadership, climate, enrollment, external regulations, faculty professionalism, governance, the community, and the nature of assessment. It is important to determine whether these aspects act as driving or restraining forces. This is dependent on the area of improvement. Some may be a a driving force for one area and a restraining force for another. We will discuss each of these aspects in the next section. However, the reader must keep in mind that it is difficult to treat these aspects of culture as separate entities. They all interact with each other on a continuous basis to create the culture of the institution.

Leadership

Keller states that the leadership of an institution is a key factor in moving an institution toward an environment of growth and improvement. (Keller, 1983, p. 164) Given the right leader, leadership becomes the driving force in institutional growth. Vaughan, in his article titled, "Scholarship and the Culture of the Community College", writes, "The effective leader understands and is sensitive to an institution's culture, respecting and preserving the good things of the past but always taking the lead in shaping the present and planning for the future;..." (Vaughan, 1992, pg. 3)

If an institution is to work toward improvement, it must be ready to make changes. The impetus for this change must come from the president of the college. The President must openly make the commitment to institutional effectiveness. He/she must be the driving force for outcomes assessment and institutional growth. The President must encourage input into the system by providing many avenues for involvement.

Governance

In November of 1990, the new college governance policy was published in the College Connection, the college newsletter. This policy was developed by a group of individuals who represented all aspects of the college; faculty, students, supportive staff, administration, and security. The purpose of this policy is to "foster and improve communications and collegiality ..." (College Connection, 1990, pg 2) It marks the beginning of a governance policy that is committed to institutional growth and improvement. The structure is simple and its procedures are clearly delineated. It clearly separates issues of collective bargaining from issues that are appropriate for the governance process. It strongest component is its emphasis on a free flow of information from the bottom up, the top down and across senates.

Climate

Lindquist stresses the need for openness in the change process in order to create change that is accepted and institutionalized. Hoy and Miskel describe an open climate as one that has a high degree of trust, a leadership that is considerate of faculty and staff, and participants with a sense of satisfaction when tasks are completed. (Hoy and Miskel, 1982, pp.189-190) Our model encompasses the interaction theory of change which stresses that there must be interaction between the various constituents. This interaction enhances the validation and communication of new ideas. (Lindquist, 1978, pp. 4 & 240) The new governance policy described above encompasses this concept.

Degree of Faculty Professionalism

Involvement in the change process will be facilitated by implementing the expertise of the faculty on the campus. A faculty that is committed to specialized role skills and whose reference group is the professional field of interest will enhance the improvement process. The institution must recognize this professionalism and provide the resources for faculty to establish linkages with the external environment.

External Regulations

All institutions of higher education are subject to regulations and policies from outside the institution. The public institutions must respond to state and Federal policies and procedures. These regulations become driving forces for change in institutions because funding is usually linked to compliance. This is particularly true for basic skills which is state mandated in New Jersey.

Funding

In New Jersey the funding for community colleges comes from the state, the county, and student tuition. The counties in general pay the larger share. Burlington County freeholders contribute about 50% of Burlington's monies. This is more than any other N.J. county contributes to its county college. Funding for the early nineties looks grim. As a result, this lack of funding will become a driving force in how we implement our programs. This is particularly true of the basic skills program. The push will be in the direction of establishing new ways to remediate an increasing number of students with less full-time faculty.

Enrollment

Burlington has experienced an increase in enrollment over the last five years. We project that this trend will continue into at least the middle nineties. Increasing enrollment linked with limited funding acts as a driving force for the review of existing programs, the consideration of certain new programs and the reallocation of resources of such programs.

Community

Burlington County College is strongly connected to the Burlington County community. It has several articulation programs with local high schools, many training contracts with local businesses and industries, and many links with various social agencies. We offer non-credit courses that are recreational in nature, are designed for self-improvement, or are career related. It is important that the community is represented in the various processes on the campus. This provides avenues for input by community representatives and avenues to keep the community informed about the college's problems and its accomplishments.

The Nature of Assessment

The collection and analysis of data is an important factor to drive institutional improvement. This involves a sufficient data base for various assessment activities. We have such a database for the basic skills information. This database allows us to complete the necessary reports to the state as well as other analyses that we may need. With such software as LOTUS, SPSSX and dBASE, we have the capacity to report information in very concise, simple, and useful formats. Information plays a major role in "unfreezing" the status quo.

III. Results of Process

This section of the model will vary depending on the nature of the improvement areas and the nature of the analysis of the culture of the institution as it pertains to a given improvement area. However, the results will be of two types. The first type will cover changes in the goals, objectives, and assessment methods which result from implementation of the new procedures, policies, curriculum, etc. The second is the actual new procedures, policies, curriculum, etc.

In the case of the basic skills program, the results would include:

1. The consolidation of the various remedial labs and tutoring;
2. The assignment of students whose placement scores are significantly below the level of the college level remedial courses to our community services remedial programs;
3. The elimination of reading 101 as an option for remedial students; and
4. The development of pre-college courses for skills deficient students in reading, English, and mathematics who need 12 credits to receive financial aid.

Change Strategies in the Basic Skills Program

The basic skills program is a result of state mandated basic skills placement testing. The state program provides clear outcomes statement for remediation in NJ colleges and universities. In addition, they have established standards for institutions on these outcomes. Each institution must submit data showing its performance. The data is reviewed by the basic skills council, made up of faculty from NJ colleges, to determine strengths and weaknesses of each institution's remediation program. This information is published and distributed to the State Board of Higher Education and the college Presidents.

In order to change the <u>status quo</u> of the institution in regard to the basic skills program we needed to address the driving and restraining factors which have been in balance. We needed to find ways to change the balance of these forces. In this section, we will discuss several of the strategies that we are using to "unfreeze" the situation. Many of the projects have been completed, others are in process.

Presentation of the Data

A presentation by the Director of Testing and Academic Assessment was scheduled for the first faculty meeting at the beginning of the spring semester. At that meeting she described the New Jersey Outcome Standards for basic skills in reading, writing, computation, and algebra. In addition, she described how the college's remedial program did on those standards. By the end of the presentation it was clear that the reading program was below standard on all of the outcomes.

Comprehensive Analysis

In April of 1991, the President implemented a comprehensive analysis process. This effort was prompted by the reduction of state funding. Four task forces, Institutional Support, Academic Programs, Student Services, and Community and Business Services, were formed to complete the analysis. In order to link the work of the task forces to the various constituencies of the college, the President included representatives from all of the various campus groups on all of the task forces. For example, the Academic Task Force included administration, community, and institutional support staff in addition to faculty. In the past, such a task force would only include faculty, usually representing each academic division.

The remediation program was included in the Academic Programs Task Force. The purpose was to inform as well as have this group make recommendations. This was another way of linking information among the college constituencies.

Basic Skills Handbook

Prior to September of this year, there was no basic skills handbook. Questions about basic skills testing and placement were often answered differently by different departments. In addition, there was a general overall lack of awareness of the NJ basic skills standards and how we were performing on those standards.

In order to increase awareness and to standardize the responses to questions, we prepared the basic skills handbook. It was the result of meetings with task forces, division faculty, coordinators, counselors, registration staff, and admissions staff. The handbook contains the NJ basic skills standards and the procedures for testing and placement. As a result, everyone is giving out the same information. This is an example of another way to link people together, to inform people, and to implement procedures in a consistent fashion.

Review of Reading Program by External Consultants

As stated earlier, the reading program seems to have difficulty performing at standard on the NJ state effectiveness outcomes. For the last twenty years the reading program has not changed significantly. The program was reviewed in 1987 by the faculty member who developed the program twenty years ago. The review covered enrollment, the curriculum, and some history. There was no reference to the NJ standards because they did not exist at the time. In addition, the review process did not involve other faculty or outside consultants.

We will be conducting a review of the reading program this fall. Our purpose is to determine alternate ways of teaching reading to a large number of students with large numbers of adjunct faculty. The review will also focus on improving performance on the state standards. We are in the process of selecting the consultants. We hope to obtain those who have teaching experience in remedial reading and who use computer/video assisted instruction.

Formation of Task Forces

We used task forces, as another strategy, to address specific standards and or issues. The individuals selected were those who worked directly in areas where improvement was needed. In order to facilitate the work, guidelines were written for each task force. In addition, they were all chaired by the Director of Testing and Academic Assessment. This was done to coordinate the efforts of the task forces and to link the work of the task forces together. At the first meeting, the chair presented the NJ basic skills standards and showed how the college performed on these standards during the last three years. This set the tone and direction for the work of the task forces. Lastly, the outcome for each task force was the improvement in the standards for which they were addressing. Each task force submitted a report to the President.

Supporting Faculty Already Involved in Computer/Video Instruction

In order to get faculty involved, we focused on providing support to those faculty who persuring the use of technology in the classroom. In the spring of the year, the college sent two of our math faculty who have been actively and successfully working with computers in remedial mathematics to a conference in Jacksonville, Florida. When they returned they presented a plan to the President for a multi-approach math lab. The plan called for a small lecture room with computer support, several one-on-one tutoring rooms, several small group tutoring rooms, and computer and interactive video stations which support the

textbook and the class instruction. Within a week, the President approved the renovations and the lab became a reality.

Our plans for the future are to send reading and writing faculty to the same conference that the math faculty attended. Each of these areas have a computer lab. However the faculty have not integrated the computer support programs into the curriculum to the same extent as the math faculty. It is anticipated that those faculty who attend the conference will return with a new energy to integrate the computer support programs.

Informal Discussions with Key People

In addition to the task forces and the more formal strategies, the President has held many conversations with faculty and administrators about the basic skills program. He has used the performance on the state standards as the focus of his concerns and ideas for improving the program. He has met with the various faculty who teach in the remedial reading, writing and mathematics courses. This type of dialog enhances the chance that changes will be accepted and institutionalize.

Conclusion

We have shown how our Model for Institutional Improvement was used to guide our efforts to improve our basis skills program. Some of the strategies that we are using are still in process. Therefore, the total impact of our work will not be evident until their completion. However, some of the strategies have been completed and resulted in improvement in our performance on the basic skills standards. It is hoped that by December we will have a computerized lab for reading, writing and mathematics in one location. Lastly, we would like to see improvement on the standards for those students who received the new approach by their second spring semester.

References

Keller, George. Academic Strategy The Management Revolution in Higher Education. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Lewin, Kurt. "Group Dynamics and Social Change" in Amitai Etzioni and Eva Etzioni (Ed.) Social Change Sources Patterns and Consequences. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1964.

Lindquist, Jack. Strategies for Change. California: Pacific Soundings Press, 1978.

New Jersey Basic Skills Council. Effectiveness of Remedial Programs in Public Colleges and Universities Fall 1987-1989. Department of Higher Education, November 1991.

Burlington County College. College Connection. Burlington County College, November, 28, 1990.

Vaughan, George B. "Scholarship and the Culture of the Community College", in Fostering a Climate for Faculty Scholarship at Community Colleges. Washington D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1992. Editors James C. Palmer and George B. Vaughan

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges

SEP 25 1992